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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 001304

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [TU](#) [EZ](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: EU/TURKEY: CZECHS REMAIN FAVORABLE, BUT NOT FIRM;
LINKAGE TO CROATIA POSSIBLE

REF: A. PRAGUE 1256

[1](#)B. PRAGUE 1243

Classified By: Pol-Econ Counselor Mike Dodman for reasons 1.4 b+d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Czechs continue to support moving forward with the Oct 3 negotiations on Turkish accession. They are engaged in negotiating the EU's counter-declaration, with the focus not on recognition but the modalities of the Customs Union, i.e., restrictions at Turkish ports. The Czechs remain increasingly forward-leaning on Croatian accession. At this point they do not intend to link the two, but the Czech assurances are weak enough that support for such linkage is conceivable down the road. The Turkish Ambassador visited Ambassador Cabaniss on Sept 7 to complain that he feared the Czechs were becoming increasingly supportive of the Austrian position on Turkey. Ambassador raised Turkey in a meeting with PM Paroubek on Sept 5, and will continue the discussion at a follow-up meeting on Sept [9](#). End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Numerous discussions over the past week with Czech officials all indicate that the Czechs support the EU launching accession talks with Turkey on Oct 3. Current MFA focus remains (refs) on legal questions stemming from the Turkish declaration on non-recognition of Cyprus. In terms of the proposed EU counter-declaration, MFA staff report the Czechs are not concerned about the specific language related to recognition, but rather the details involving full implementation of the Customs Union. MFA Director of the Balkan Department, Tomas Szunyog, told Pol-Econ Chief that the Czechs, as new members who continue to see restrictions on movement of labor, are particularly sensitive to any limits placed on full implementation of a binding agreement like the Customs Union, i.e., Turkish refusal to accept certain Cypriot vessels at the ports. While focused on these technicalities, none of the staff we have spoken with in the MFA and Prime Minister's office suggested that they would be sufficient to block the start of talks next month.

[1](#)3. (C) Of greater concern, potentially, is Turkish activity on Croatia. As discussed ref A, PM Paroubek has been increasingly outspoken that EU talks with Croatia begin immediately, regardless of the status of war criminals. In a rare show of agreement, Czech President Klaus, during a visit to Croatia this week, said the same. MFA officials confirm that the shift in Czech policy on Croatia is firm. When asked about a linkage between EU talks with Turkey and Croatia, Ivan Busniak, Foreign Policy to PM Paroubek, insisted that Czech policy has not linked the two, but left this open as a possibility should this become part of a broader political deal on Turkey among EU leaders.

[1](#)4. (C) Ambassador raised U.S. support for Turkish accession during a Sept 5 meeting with PM Paroubek on Katrina relief. Paroubek was not able to respond during that meeting, but Ambassador will raise again when the two meet on Sept 9.

[1](#)5. (C) Turkish Ambassador Duatepe asked to meet with Ambassador on Sept 7. He said that for the first time in his two years in Prague he is sensing that Czech support for accession is weakening, and specifically that the Czechs are supporting the "Christian Democratic" position on Turkey typified by Austria. He urged USG to continue to engage with both PM and FM on the question.

[1](#)6. (C) Comment: As discussed reftels, we share the Turkish Ambassador's assessment that FM Svoboda, a Christian Democrat, has been able to exert greater influence in shaping the GOCR position on Turkish accession than was the case in recent years. Still, our discussions over the past month have tended to increase confidence that the Czechs will support a clean launch of negotiations next month. That said, the Czech position is far from firm (certainly not as robust as their new stance on Croatia), and can be shaped by outside forces, notably the political debates among European leaders. The Czechs could well emerge as a strong supporter of a deal to link Turkish and Croatian accession. We will continue to engage the Czechs at the highest levels on both Turkey and Croatia.
CABANISS